

Ranacker Conservation Area

Ten Year Area Management Plan FY 2014-2023




Wildlife Division Chief

3/9/15
Date

Ranacker Conservation Area Management Plan Approval Page

PLANNING TEAM

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NORTHEAST REGION

RCT Chair

Chris Sels
Signature 2/19/15
Date

WILDLIFE DIVISION

Unit Chief

Michael D Schaefer
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Date

OVERVIEW

- **Official Area Name:** Ranacker Conservation Area, # 6710
- **Year of Initial Acquisition:** 1967
- **Acreage:** 1,831 acres
- **County:** Pike
- **Division with Administrative Responsibility:** Wildlife
- **Division with Maintenance Responsibility:** Wildlife
- **Statements of Purpose:**
 - A. Strategic Direction**
Manage the area to encourage healthy populations of deer, turkey, small game, non-game and fish species; and provide compatible recreational opportunities.
 - B. Desired Future Condition**
The desired future condition of Ranacker Conservation Area (CA) is a healthy forest and woodland community with interspersed open fields comprised of agriculture, grassland and old fields; and to provide high quality riparian areas along Peno Creek, its tributaries and the associated watershed.
 - C. Federal Aid Statement**
This area, or a portion thereof, was acquired with Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration funds to restore and manage wildlife, conserve and restore suitable wildlife habitat and provide public access for hunting or other wildlife-oriented recreation.

GENERAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS

- I. Special Considerations**
 - A. Priority Areas:** Ranacker CA lies within the Peno Creek Woodlands Terrestrial Conservation Opportunity Area (COA) and the Peno Creek Priority Watershed.
 - B. Natural Area:** None
- II. Important Natural Features and Resources**
 - A. Species of Conservation Concern:** Species of conservation concern are not known from this site, but are found in the surrounding area. Area Managers should consult annually with the Natural History Biologist.
 - B. Caves:** Yes, records kept with the Missouri Department of Conservation's (the Department's) Natural History Biologist. Managers should follow the Cave Management policy found in the Department's Resource Policy Manual. All caves on this and other conservation areas are closed or restricted to public access. The fungus that causes white-nose syndrome in bats has been documented in Missouri. As a

result, the Department has implemented a White-nose Syndrome Action Plan that limits public access to protect bats.

C. Springs: None

III. Existing Infrastructure

- Unmanned shooting range with 25, 50 and 100 yard targets
- 7 parking lots
- 3 ADA privies
- 3 concrete low-water stream crossings
- 1.5 miles of gravel road open to public access

IV. Area Restrictions or Limitations

A. Deed Restrictions or Ownership Considerations: None

B. Federal Interest: Uses of land acquired with federal funds may not interfere with the purpose for which it was acquired. Federal funds may also be used in the management of this land. Fish and wildlife agencies may not allow recreational activities and related facilities that would interfere with the purpose for which the State is managing the land. Other uses may be acceptable and must be assessed in each specific situation.

C. Easements:

1. Ameren UE power line
2. Public Water Supply District # 1
3. McCune private roadway

D. Cultural Resources Findings: Yes, records kept with the Department Environmental Compliance Specialist. Managers should follow Best Management Practices for Cultural Resources found in the Department Resource Policy Manual.

E. Hazards and Hazardous Materials: None observed.

F. Endangered Species: Endangered Species are not known from this site, but are found in the surrounding area. Area Managers should consult annually with the Natural History Biologist.

G. Boundary Issues: None

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

V. Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) The open land on Ranacker CA is comprised of grasslands, old fields and agriculture fields. There are scattered remnant stands of native grass and forbs on the area with some fields planted in warm season grass. The grassland and old-

field habitats have been invaded by both sericea lespedeza and fescue, with autumn olive scattered throughout the area. One of the challenges associated with open land management is the control and overall reduction of invasive plants on the area.

- 2) Ranacker CA is a popular destination for deer and turkey hunters as well as small game hunters. Management of the area's open land should continue to provide needed food and cover resources to provide for wildlife needs and hunter expectations.
- 3) Ranacker CA was inventoried by a consulting forester in 2004. No previous forest inventory exists for the area. Of the area's 1,831 total acres, 1,544 are forested.
- 4) The majority of timber (65%) on Ranacker CA is immature sawtimber sized (12+ inches in diameter at breast height(dbh)). Most of the stands are overstocked and need to be thinned. Timber harvests are a feasible option due to good species composition and quality. The predominant tree species found on the area are white oak, black oak, hickory and northern red oak, ranging in size from seedlings to overmature large sawtimber.
- 5) There is a 55-acre stand on the south end of the area that is being managed as woodland. It was burned in 2006 following a timber stand improvement (TSI) in 2005, and burned again in 2008. Rotational burning will be continued to manage this unit.

Management Objective 1: Maintain open land acres in a productive state for wildlife and reduce or eradicate invasive species.

Strategy 1: Maintain grassland and old field areas in an open and early successional stage.

Strategy 2: Control invasive plants across the area.

Management Objective 2: Manage open land habitat to enhance deer, turkey and small game populations.

Strategy 1: Annually plant and manage sunflowers to provide forage and hunting opportunity for doves.

Strategy 2: Provide food plots as needed.

Strategy 3: Enhance edge habitat.

Strategy 4: Provide early successional vegetation.

Strategy 5: Promote and enhance native grass and forb stands.

Management Objective 3: Thin forest stands to reduce stocking to a more optimum level to provide healthier stands.

Strategy 1: Implement post-harvest TSI in stands 42, 43, 46, 47, 48, 618, 49, 50, 64 and 619 (161 acres total) in fiscal year (FY) 2014.

Strategy 2: Implement post-harvest TSI in stands 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 65, 66, 68, 621, 622, 623 and 624 (227 acres total) in FY 16.

Strategy 3: Implement TSI in stand 67 (11 acres) in conjunction with post-sale TSI mentioned in Strategy 2.

Management Objective 4: Implement the second timber sale in Compartment 2.

Strategy 1: Mark and sell timber in stands 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 65, 66, 68, 621, 622, 623 and 624 (227 acres total.)

Management Objective 5: Implement various management practices necessary to maintain the woodland unit.

Strategy 1: Provide disturbance on a 3-5 year rotation to continue to move this stand toward a higher quality woodland condition.

VI. Aquatic Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) There are 12.5 miles of stream on Ranacker CA, which lie within the Peno Creek Priority Watershed. Sampling in 2009 revealed a robust aquatic community in Peno Creek and first- and second-order tributaries on the area. Best management practices will be observed to ensure management activities on the CA do not negatively affect water quality within these high quality streams.
- 2) There are six ponds on the CA. Five of these are small (<0.5 acres), shallow, fishless ponds that do not support viable fisheries. They serve as wildlife watering sites and important habitat for amphibians and reptiles. The sixth pond does contain fish, but does not support a viable fishery.
- 3) There are numerous low-water crossings on the area including three concrete structures that provide access to the area. During periods of heavy rainfall the large crossing on Peno creek becomes impassable. These crossings can be barriers to fish movement.

Management Objective 1: Maintain the high quality streams on the area.

Strategy 1: Encourage conservative farming practices in the watershed on Department owned land and private land.

Strategy 2: Maintain a forested corridor through natural regeneration or planting with a minimum width of 50 feet, from top of bank on all tributary streams shown on the land cover map. Maintain a forested corridor with a minimum width of 100 feet from the top of bank along Peno Creek. Inspect riparian corridors along all agricultural fields annually to determine the need for field adjustments.

Strategy 3: Where feasible, move field access roads from the 50-foot wide stream corridor on tributary streams.

Strategy 4: All management activities on the area will follow the Watershed and Stream Management Guidelines for Lands Managed by the Department.

Management Objective 2: Provide suitable habitat for amphibians and reptiles in ponds with no fisheries management potential.

Strategy 1: Do not renovate ponds that provide no long-term fisheries management options.

Management Objective 3: Improve the Peno Creek stream crossing to provide safer public use and better aquatic organism passage.

Strategy 1: Submit a capital improvement project to remove current stream crossings and replace with improved low-water crossings.

Management Objective 4: Maintain all gravel low-water crossings on the area to provide dependable access.

Strategy 1: Annually inspect all gravel crossings and repair, as needed, to provide dependable access and maintain stream quality.

VII. Public Use Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) The area offers multiple public use opportunities for outdoor recreation and education, including hunting, fishing, camping, wildlife viewing, hiking and educational field trips.
- 2) The area provides an unstaffed shooting range with 25, 50 and 100 yard targets.
- 3) Ranacker is one of seven CAs across the state that allows horseback riding by special use permit.

Management Objective 1: Provide quality outdoor recreational opportunities for area users by maintaining area facilities to provide user access and safety.

Strategy 1: Maintain existing parking lots, bulletin boards, privies and field roads to facilitate use by area users.

Strategy 2: Annually provide managed fields that provide good dove hunting opportunities and encourage user participation.

Management Objective 2: Maintain the unstaffed shooting range.

Strategy 1: Maintain the range according to approved Department maintenance standards.

Management Objective 3: Provide horseback riding opportunities on area field roads.

Strategy 1: Continue issuing special use permits.

Strategy 2: Continue monitoring riding activity through riding logs and site checks.

Strategy 3: Maintain field roads and parking lots to prevent damage and enhance riding activity.

VIII. Administrative Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

A portion of the public access road between the Peno Creek crossing and the shooting range lies within 100 feet of Peno Creek.

Management Objective 1: Relocate a portion of the public access road that lies between the Peno Creek crossing and the shooting range outside of the riparian corridor.

Strategy 1: Submit a small construction project to relocate a portion of the public access road.

Management Objective 2: Evaluate land offered for sale adjacent to Ranacker CA.

Strategy 1: When available, adjacent land may be considered for acquisition from willing sellers. Tracts that improve area access, provide public use opportunities, contain unique natural communities and/or species of conservation concern, or meet other Department priorities as identified in the annual Department land acquisition priorities may be considered.

MANAGEMENT TIMETABLE

Strategies are considered ongoing unless listed in the following table:

APPENDICES

Area Background:

The area is characterized by narrow valleys with numerous rock overhangs and consists of 1,544 acres of forest, 55 acres of woodland, 116 acres of agricultural lands, 101 acres of grasslands and old fields, 14 acres of roads and administrative areas, and 1 acre of open water. Peno Creek traverses the northern portion of the area, providing over a mile of stream frontage. The Department purchased the original 716 acres in 1967 from Roy Ranacker, a local businessman. Additional purchases, partially financed by the Pittman-Robertson excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition, have increased the area to its present 1,831 acres. In 1799, Benjamin Spencer established a salt business a few miles west of Frankford. Sac and Fox Native Americans threatened Spencer's safety, and his salt processing works were abandoned after a short period. The salt springs later became known as Spencer Lick. Permanent Euro-American settlements occurred in the vicinity as early as 1816. The remnants of a short line railroad track, constructed in 1872 and abandoned in 1944, can still be seen on the area. Ranacker CA marks a point where river hills break away from the prairie. In pre-settlement times, the area probably consisted exclusively of woodlands and small prairies. It is now home to a variety of wildlife, including deer, turkey and bobwhite quail. Management of the area focuses on providing wildlife habitat by maintaining timber edges and old fields, prescribed timber harvest, rotating agricultural crops, stream fish habitat and water quality protection.

Current Land and Water Types

| Land/Water Type | Acres | Miles | % of Area |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-----------|
| Forest | 1,544 | | 84 |
| Cropland | 116 | | 6 |
| Old Field | 68 | | 4 |
| Woodland | 55 | | 3 |
| Grassland | 33 | | 2 |
| Roads/Administrative | 14 | | <1 |
| Impounded Water | 1 | | <1 |
| Stream Frontage | | 12.5 | |

References:

Watershed and Stream Management Guidelines for Lands Managed by the Missouri Department of Conservation. 2009. Missouri Department of Conservation.

Public Input Summary:

The draft Ranacker Conservation Area Management Plan was available for a public comment period August 1–31, 2014. The Missouri Department of Conservation received comments from five respondents (Appendix A). The Ranacker Conservation Area Planning Team carefully reviewed and considered these ideas as they finalized this document. A brief summary of public input themes, including how they were incorporated or why they were not, can be found below. Rather than respond to each individual comment, comments are grouped into general themes and are addressed collectively.

Department responses to themes and issues identified through Ranacker Conservation Areas public comment period

Supports keeping current deer regulations for area.

Public area deer regulations are currently under review statewide and any decision to change specific area regulations will be a result of that review.

Appreciates fishless ponds for invertebrates and amphibians.

The area planning team appreciates your comment and plans to maintain these ponds in their current state.

Requests information on where funds go from timber harvest.

All funds from timber harvest are deposited in the Department's General Fund. The funds do not go directly back to the area.

Requests information on whether firewood cutting is allowed.

Firewood cutting is allowed through a special use permit issued by the local forester. Each request is considered on an individual basis and issued as long as the request will not have an impact on specific habitat management goals.

Suggests creation of multi-use trail (hike/bike/horse) with several loops. Close multi-use trail during hunting season, if necessary.

Ranacker CA is one of seven conservation areas in the state that allows horse riding through a special use permit. With access to multiple field access roads throughout the area, the planning team feels like the area provides adequate opportunity for hiking, biking, and horseback riding. The creation and maintenance of a multi-use trail on this area would divert limited staff time from necessary management activities.

Requests Special Use Permit for citizens with disabilities to use off-road mule to access area.

The Missouri Wildlife Code at 3 CSR 10-11.130 generally prohibits vehicle use except on graveled and paved roads and established parking areas. Certain electric mobility devices, such as Segways and similar-type devices, are allowed to be used by persons with disabilities on Department property, subject to certain safety restrictions. A person with a mobility disability should contact the area manager for information related to use of a specific mobility device. Hunting from a motorized vehicle on Department property is allowed by persons with mobility disabilities with a Department-issued hunting method exemption permit and a special use permit.

Suggests more openings to access Peno Creek.

While current access is limited, we feel that maintaining a high quality, forested, riparian corridor is a priority for this area and creating more openings would conflict with this plan. We will consider additional opportunities should they occur when the entrance road is relocated.

Suggests relocation of entrance road, due to heavy traffic and dust.

The current plan to relocate a portion of the entrance road only addresses a small portion of the road located on the west side of the Peno Creek low water crossing. There are no plans to relocate any other portion of the entrance road.

Maps:

Figure 1: Area Map

Figure 2: Aerial Map

Figure 3: Land Cover Types and Easements

Figure 4: Forest Stand Prescription Map – Compartment 1

Figure 5: Forest Stand Prescription Map – Compartment 2

Figure 1: Area Map

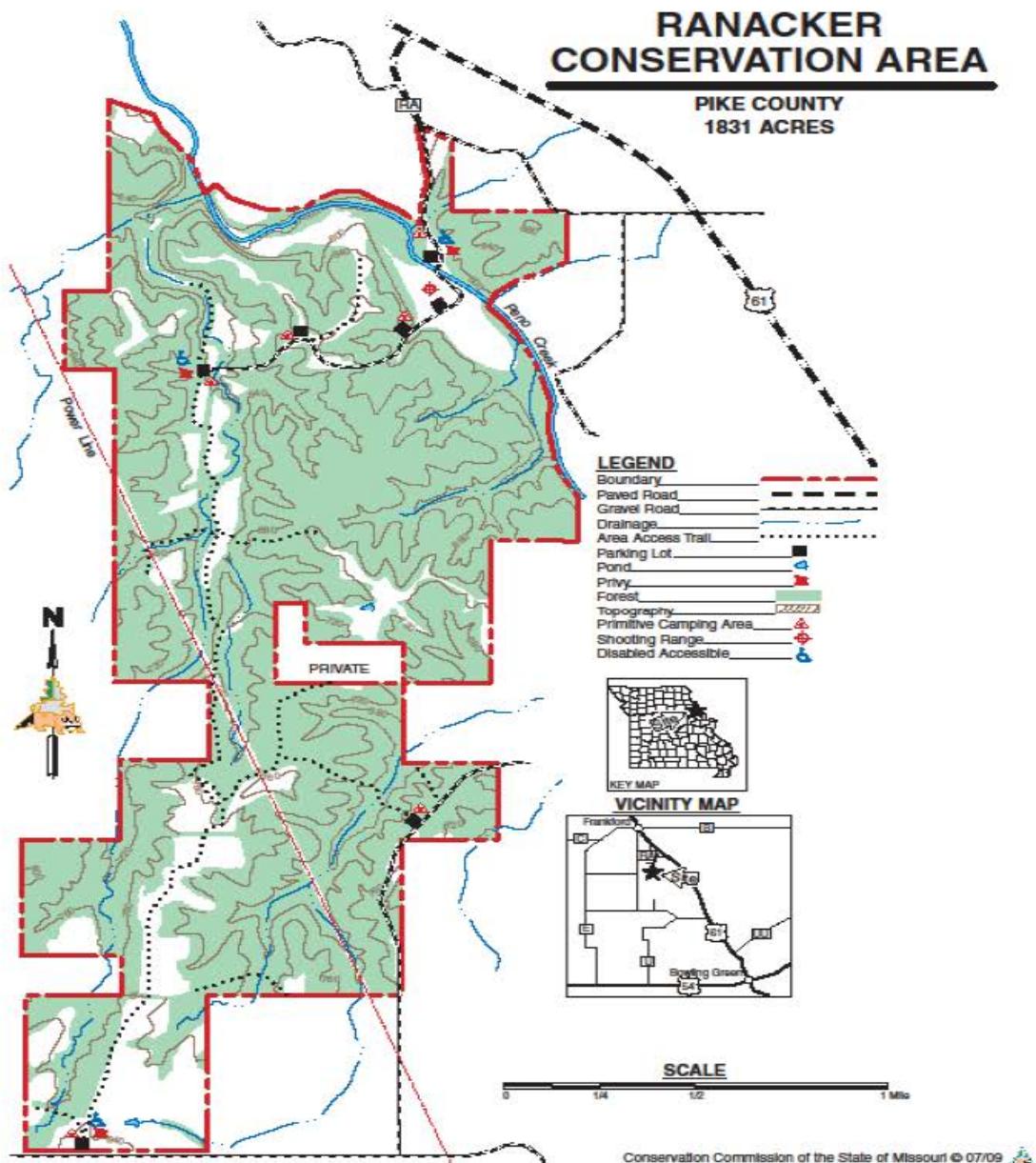


Figure 2: Aerial Map

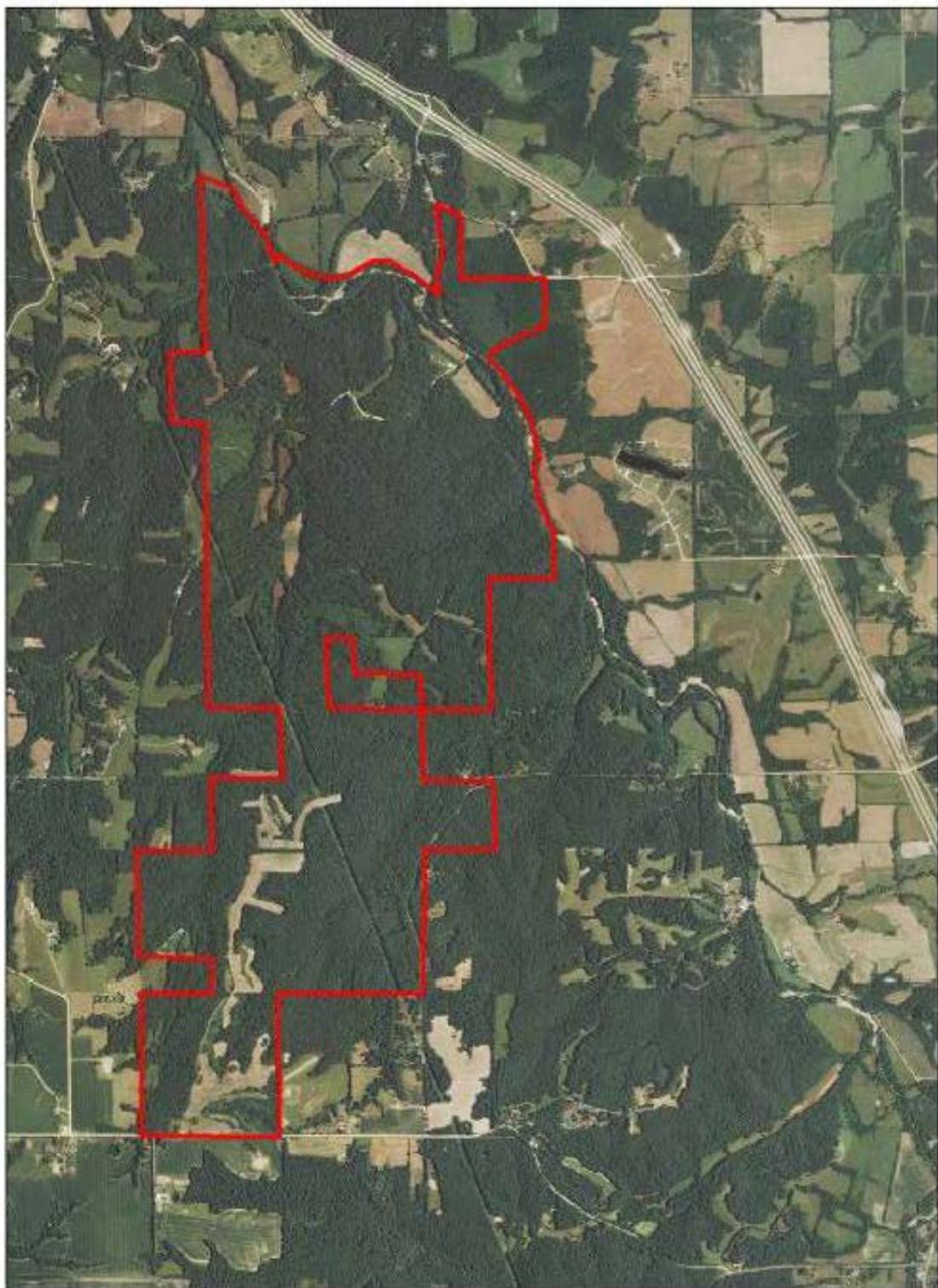


Figure 3: Land Cover Types and Easements

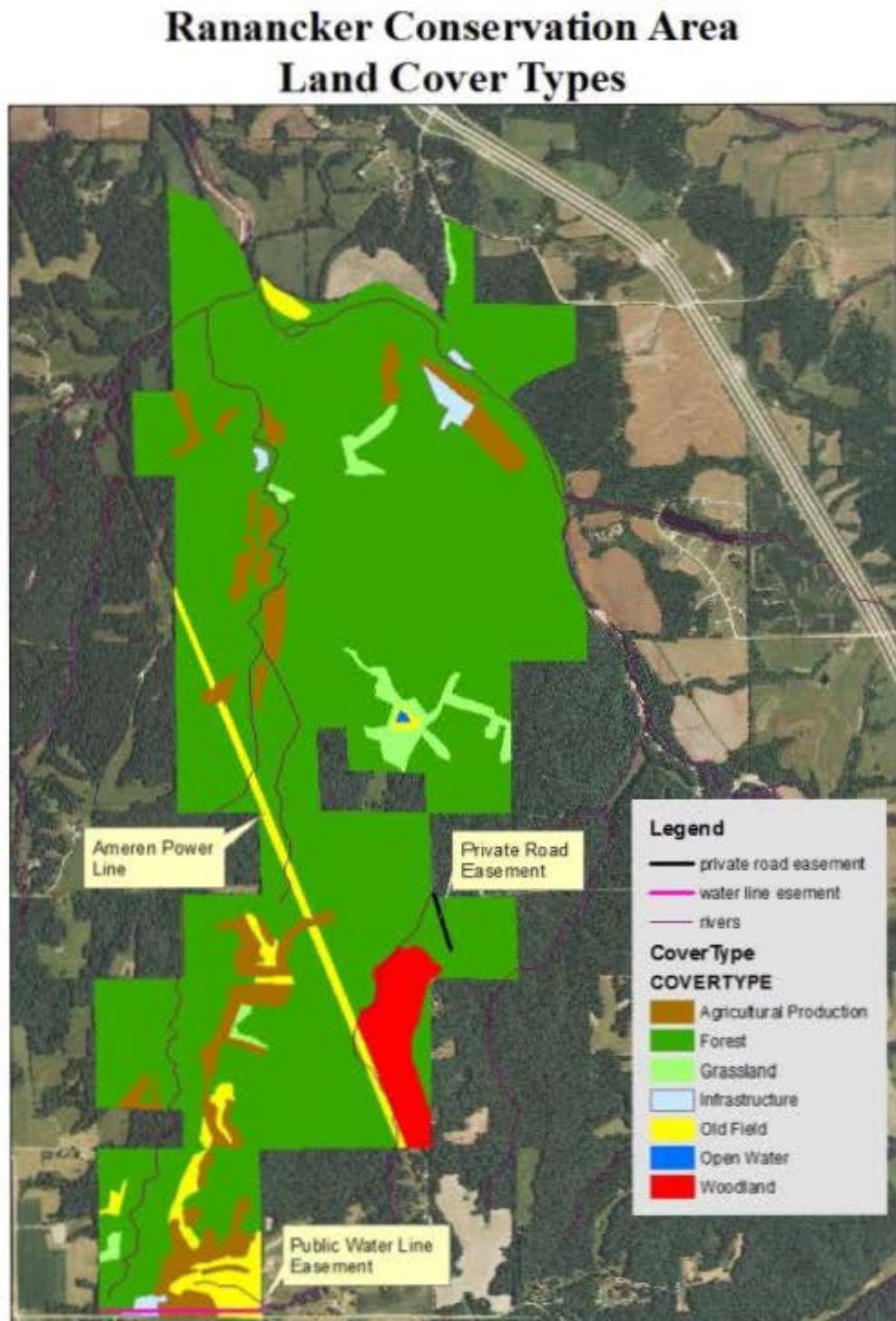


Figure 4: Forest Stand Prescription Map – Compartment 1

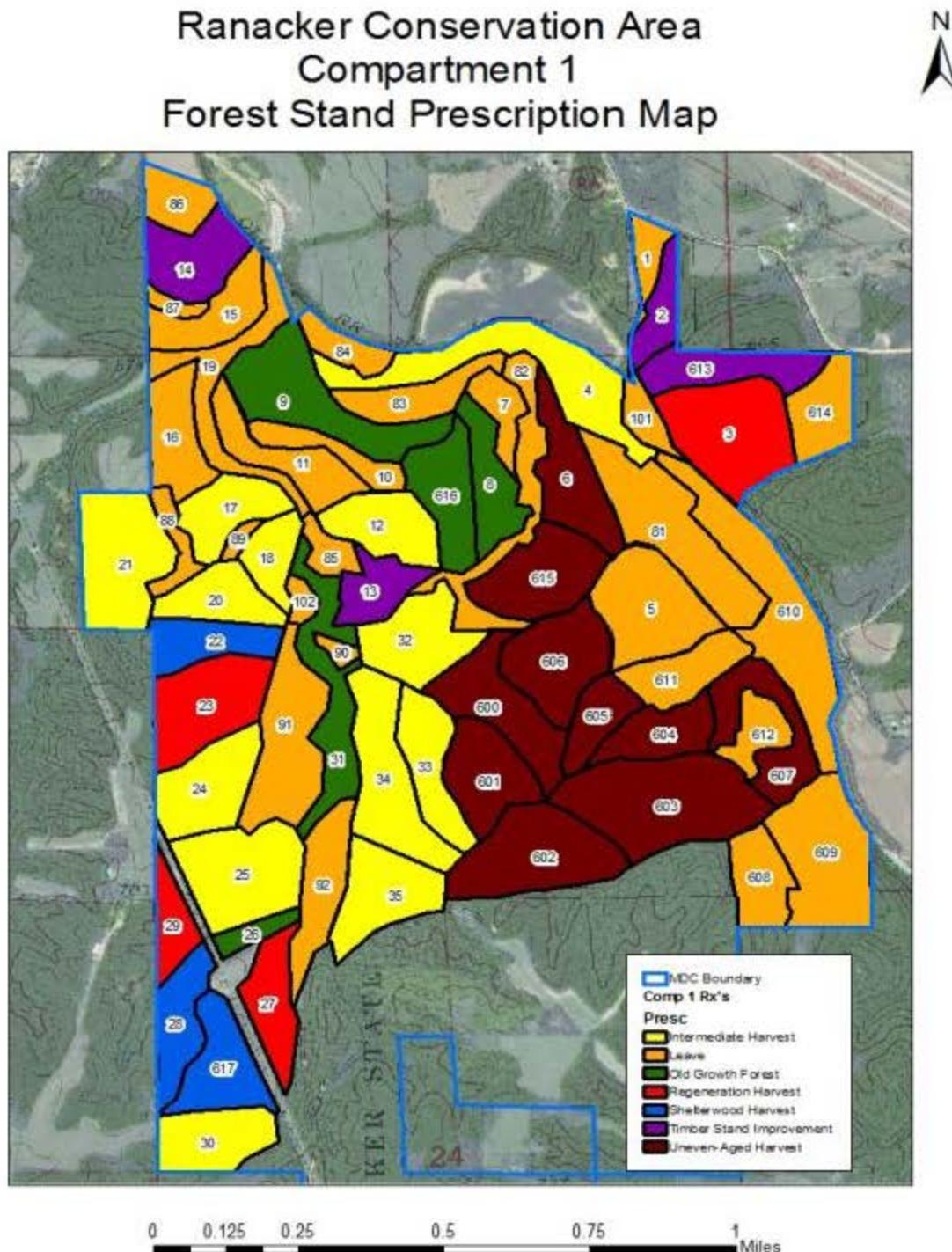
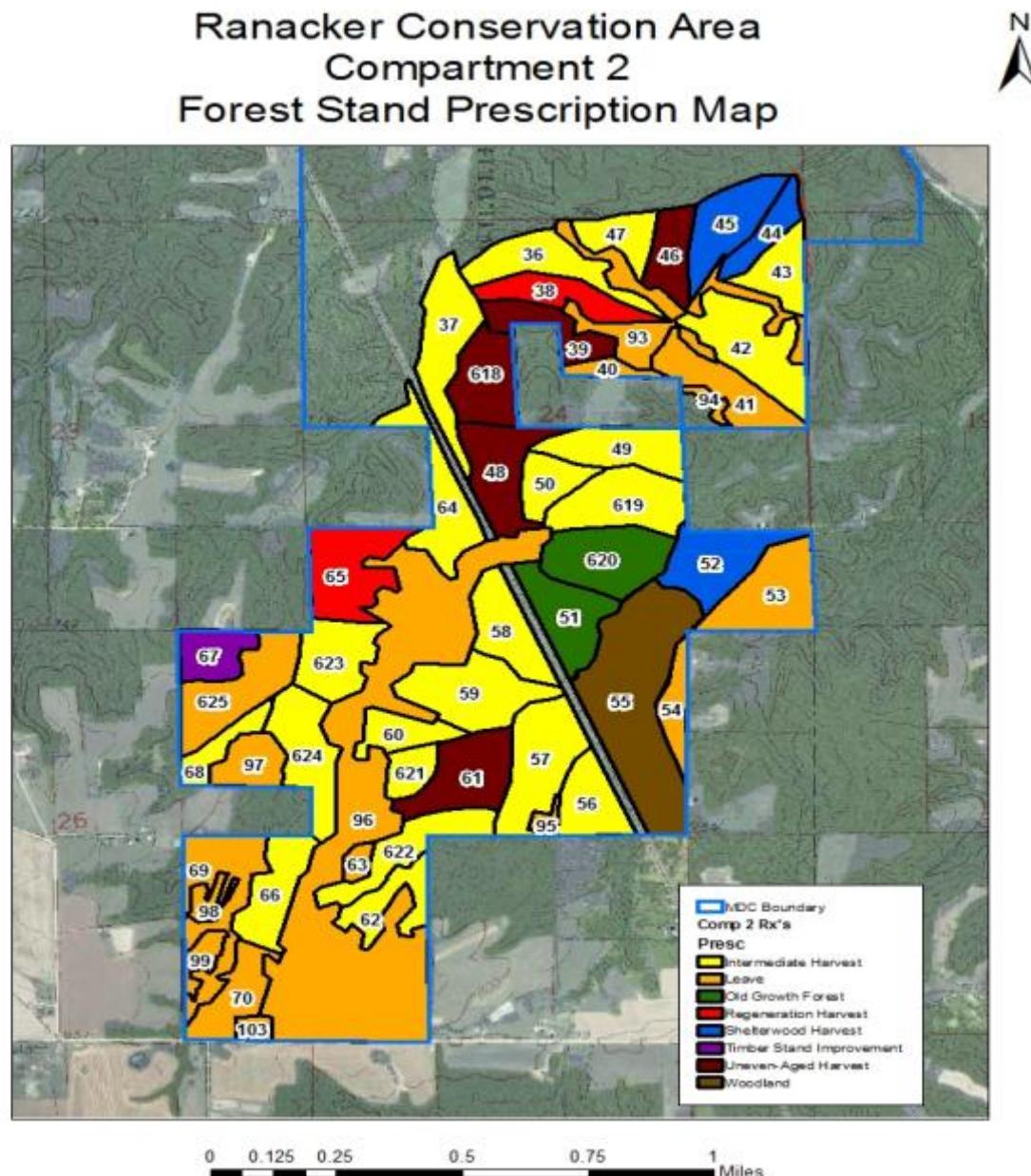


Figure 5: Forest Stand Prescription Map – Compartment 2



Appendix A. Draft Ranacker Conservation Areas Management Plan Public Comments

Received during public comment period (August 1-31, 2014)

Although your plan mentions a few fishless ponds, there are actually dozens of such ponds scattered all over the place. These really do not need any special management but should be left alone for the most part. I suppose they are valuable as "wildlife watering holes", but the real value they have for the area is for invertebrate and amphibian breeding sites.

Thanks!

I am a private land owner on CR50 across from Ranacker. I like the plan as best as I can understand it. I hope it will increase deer population and small game. I use my property for recreation and hunting. I did not know there were some small ponds. That is good. where does the money go from the timber that was harvested this year? Are the tree tops that were left available for private use? Can I go in and cut up the tops for firewood?

Is MDC looking at the property at the end of CR 50 for purchase?

I own land at the north entrance. I also am a disabled veteran of the Vietnam war. I am limited on how far I can walk and have a service connected sever hearing loss. I am unable to enjoy the complete area due to limited access. I would like to be able to ride my off road mule to other areas as I do not own a horse. I know that 3 wheelers are a major problem and people would abuse the area by driving thru areas designed for wildlife. I would like to see special permit use for disabled persons and veterans that would allow me to expierience the area off the gravel road. My mule has 4 wheels, a steering wheel, seat belts, lights, and will not travel faster than 25 miles per hour.

I also would like to see more openings in order to access Peno creek. The way it is now I can only access the stream from the north entrance at the low water bridge. I would like to see small areas cleared so the creek can can be more usable.

I hope the relocation of the entrance road is a serious consideration. When people enter the north entrance they enter the gravel at a high rate of speed. This creates a mowing danger and a lot of dust. I purchased a sign asking people to please drive slowly but they do not pay any attention. I know it is impossible to enforce the speed but the dust could be controled by having the county spay dust control chemical .

The PMP plan you have submitted is a start and I hope it is not just required gov. paper work. Than you for giving me the opertunity to voice my oppinion.

Thank you to the Department for the opportunity to comment on the Ranacker Conservation Area Management Plan. The area is composed of 1,831 acres in Pike County. Equestrian use on field access roads is now permitted by special use permit. We (Show Me Missouri Back Country Horsemen) wish to commend MDC for making the area available to equestrian use on a limited basis. The field access roads available for public multi-use are primarily in-and-out. There is a great opportunity to enhance the outdoor recreation experience for all users—hikers, mountain

bikers, bird watchers, and equestrians—through the creation of several loops by establishing and marking a few trails.

We suggest the establishment of multi-use (bike, hike, and equestrian) trails to form loops, and we (SMMBCH) offer our services (availability of volunteers permitting) to help decide on the best location and then clear and mark the trails.

We also encourage MDC to consider permitting equestrian use during all daylight hours without needing a special use permit. If public safety makes it necessary the Department could close the trails to multi-use during hunting season.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the Ranacker CA Management Plan.

Leave the deer regulations as they are at the present time. Our deer population in the area is way down! Thank you